

1943

Williams, Rollin C. - 1943-44 (typescript)

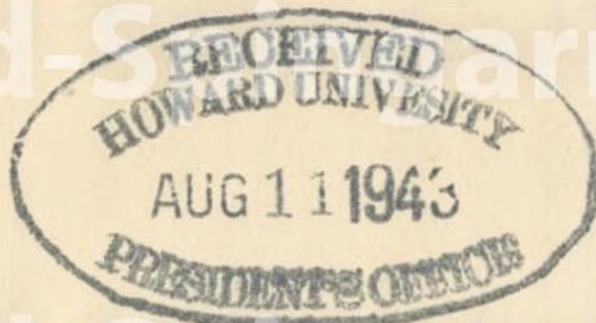
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29th Special Service Co.
Fort Huachuca, Arizona
August 6, 1943

Dear Folks! - Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Rhyan, President Johnson, et al:

I know that you are quite peeved with me for not having written to you, but honestly, I stay so busy that I very seldom have time to write to anyone. As company clerk of my organization, I believe that I am the busiest person at Huachuca.

I have wanted to write to you many times, but I knew that I did not have time to write a long letter, so I have been delaying hoping that the time would come when I would have time to sit down and write you a long letter about my life in the Army, which so far, I have found much different than I had expected. I am really enjoying it.

Right now, my company is getting ready to leave Ft. Huachuca. In fact, by the time that you get this letter, we will be in California. Therefore, I still don't have time to write. All this week I have been working all day at the company and half the night at Post Headquarters graphotyping identification tags.

As I don't have time to write you now, I am enclosing an article about my organization which was written in the camp newspaper. Please accept this until I have time to write a longer letter, which I assure you will be in the very near future. Until then, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Rollin

P. S. This article explains everything just as I would like to have written it in a letter.

29TH SPECIAL SERVICE COMPANY ACHIEVES OUTSTANDING RECORD

One of the only three all-Negro Special Service Companies in the U. S. Army and a top-notch unit of its kind, the 29th SSC recently won the distinction of being commended for successfully servicing an all-white outfit at Fort Huachuca.

The outfit serviced was the 940th Camouflage Battalion from Davis-Monthan Field located near Tucson, which was bivouaced on the rough terrain of an outlying section of the local military reservation.

A specialty show that hit a high mark for sheer entertainment, enjoyment and talent, the 29th went "all out" to give the men of the 940th something to remember them by. The show included a snappy jam session, jitterbug dance team, song and dance, vocals, skits and novelty numbers, with moving pictures as an added attraction. To top the informality of the show men of the 940th were urged to take part in the soldier-show, and responded enthusiastically.

According to Lt. Col. Ike Myers, Officer of Operations and Training, this is the first instance in World War II of a Negro unit servicing a white unit.

Lt. Col. C. E. Nelson, Special Service Officer, commends the 29th (and now departed 17th) SSC highly for the assistance which they gave to the Post Special Service Division during the pioneering and organizing stage of its operations. During the organization of the Post SSO, the 29th SSC was coordinated with it as a service company.

"Working with the 29th we accomplished a great deal more than if they had not been here," Col. Nelson states. "They had certain facilities that the Post did not have, and through their cooperation we were able to put on programs that we could not have possibly presented otherwise. Help of the 29th SSC and the 17th SSC made it possible for the 93d Division to be extensively serviced in the field when it was on maneuvers near Fort Huachuca."

The 29th SSC, which was activated at Fort Huachuca February 15, 1943, with a cadre of 14 men and one officer furnished from the 17th SSC, was later designated as a parent unit and furnished the cadre for the recently-activated 37th SSC.

High Efficiency

During an inspection on Saturday, July 3, by Inspecting Officer, Major Wright, of the 9th Service Command, the 29th SSC demonstrated exceedingly high proficiency in the performance of various phases of special service company activities.

In its recent operations with troops in the field, the 29th SSC has been setting the pace in organizing activities and putting on variety shows. Other popular service features of the 29th SSC have been its mobile exchange and mobile library utilities,

all of which have been received with great appreciation.

Men of the 29th SSC are enthusiastic about their work and appear definitely aware of the responsibility of their assignments in building up morale of fighting men. Morale of men in the company is correspondingly high and they are eager for assignments—any place, any time, anywhere.

The Special Service Company is something new in the Army. A morale-building outfit, the Special Service Company is organized to provide athletic, recreational, exchange and informational services to troops on duty overseas.

Although not actually designated as combative, these companies are thoroughly trained for their own protection. They are proficient in the use of the pistol and the carbine and in theatres of operation they are held at all times ready for actual combat.

Many Areas

Generally, they will be used in zones of communications, at ports of embarkation, in rest and leave areas, in the rear of combat zones and in oversea training areas. Special Service Companies, with their highly specialized personnel and specially developed equipment provide motion picture service, library service, musical theatrical and radio activities and exchange and canteen facilities. These companies also carry equipment with which to supplement and repair the recreational equipment of tactical units.

Various specialists are trained in such activities so that they will be able to conduct, plan or supervise informal activities including a camp newspaper, other publications and bulletins and non-military subjects under the direction of special service officials.

Special service companies consist of four platoons which are commanded by four first lieutenants and a headquarters section; the company being commanded by a captain. Each platoon is fully equipped and trained to perform completely within itself the mission of the company.

The extensive equipment which each platoon has includes sound motion picture machines, recording machines, public address systems, generators to provide current in the field, pianos and kits containing various small musical instruments such as guitars, violins, ukelales, mandolins, harmonicas, tonettes and ocarinoes. Beside these each platoon possesses exhaustively equipped kits for athletic equipment, theatrical make-up materials and costumes and publishing kits containing mimeograph machines and supplies and typewriters.

Mobile Exchange

Each platoon is also equipped
(Continued On Page Eight)

29th Special Service

(Continued From Page Two)
with a library containing approximately 2,000 books, the latest novels, mystery and detective stories as well as some of the more serious educational books. Most popular feature of the platoon's equipment is its extensive mobile exchange and field canteen.

In addition to the 29th SSC, Fort Huachuca has been the training place of the only other two all-Negro special service companies in the U.S. Army—the 17th SSC and the 37th SSC. Men in these companies are of high calibre and, on the whole, above the average in educational and other qualifications which befit them for special service assignments.

Officers assigned to the 29th SSC, with one exception, are all graduates of the School for Special Service, Fort George G. Meade, Md., and Washington and Lee university, Lexington, Va. They have been especially trained to handle units of this type and each has had previous experience in morale and recreational work.

Lt. Powell C. O.

Commanding the company is 1st Lt. Berry F. Powell of Minerva, Ohio, who is a graduate of Wilberforce university, where he majored in physical education and military science and tactics. He served as a recreational worker in the Detroit recreation department and has had several years experience in CC work.

Other officers in the 29th SSC include 2nd Lt. Aemilius K. Sherman of Newark, N. J., a graduate of Howard university, who was a social investigator and recreational director in civilian life; 2nd Lt. Harold J. Jennifer, Jr., of Washington, D. C., formerly an honor student and star athlete at Springfield college, Springfield, Mass.; who served as a playground director and recreational worker in Washington before coming into the Army; 2nd Lt. George E. Mencer of Baton Rouge, La., a graduate of Leland college, Baton Rouge, where he attained prominence in athletics and later taught physical education; and 2nd Lt. John R. Boone, Washington, D. C., a graduate of Howard university, whose civilian occupations included several years of newspaper work and active promotion of recreational and social organizations, including the management of the Washington Lions, professional football team.

(F)
29th Special Service Company
APO #93, Los Angeles, 52, California



3 November 43

Hello Everybody!

Thanks a lot for the "Bison". I know I've looked at it a million times. It really makes me forget about the Army and once again brings me back to the campus, and I can hardly wait until I can once more visit the campus. I shall never forget your kindness for sending me the "Bison".

I have been out on the range all week, and tomorrow I go to camouflage school. Our camp looks like Pittsburgh these days. It is very cold in the morning and smoke pours from all of the thousands of tents here.

The division is now on tactical problems, and is going out on maneuvers next week. As we are an unassigned unit we will not have to go on maneuvers with them, and I've heard that we might get furloughs. I can hardly wait to see a tree again. Although it has only rained twice since August, we have quite a few sandstorms.

Andy Howard and I met in Los Angeles a few weeks ago. He has gained quite a few pounds since he left Howard. I imagine that the Army has put weight on me too. At least I feel heavier.

I must close now and make out the status report. Thank again for the "Bison" and write soon.

Rollin

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION OFFICE
14TH ENGINEER TRAINING GROUP
ENGINEER TRAINING SECTION
FORT LEWIS, WASHINGTON

17 November 44

Dear Mr. Nabrit:

I received your card asking for my address for your Armed Service File. However, I could not just fill out the card and send it back. As an alumnus of Howard, I feel that it is my duty to let you know of my life in the Army, what I'm doing, etc.

I was formerly a member of the 29th Special Service Company. However, in August, that company was inactivated and all officers and enlisted men became member of the Engineer Training Section here at Fort Lewis. For a short while, I was clerk for one of the training companies here. Presently, I am with the Information and Education Officer, under Capt. Robert W. Wilson, who was formerly with Howard's zoology department, and later with the ASTP at Howard.

In my work, I introduce orientation films to the recruits. The orientation program is composed of films and discussions. The films are a "Why We Fight" series, dealing with the backgrounds and early development of the war. The discussions are about topics of military and post-war interest: "What To Do With Germany After the War", "Propaganda", "How Can the United Nations Maintain World Peace After the War", etc. Before each discussion, I hold briefing sessions with the orientation discussion leaders (6 from each company, 30 companies). I check on the company discussions during the periods set aside for them. The movies and discussions are on alternate weeks. I am also a member of the Sunday forums, member of our "Information, Please", and associate editor of the 14th Group newspaper, which, incidentally, I named "The Castle". I also assist with the literacy school--checking attendance, loading the trucks, and clerical duties. In addition to this, I am a student at the Seattle Stenotype Institute, which requires that I study at least nine hours per week, and attend the institute at least twice a month for examinations.

Other Howardites here at Fort Lewis are:

| | | |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Sgt. Verginald Dolphin |) | |
| Sgt. James A. McCall |) | Co. I, 55th ET Bn |
| Cpl. Ernest "Breeze" Wynne |) | |
| Pvt. Oscar Gandy | - | Co H, 54th ET Bn |

Until I see you around the middle of January, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Rollin C. Williams
ROLLIN C. WILLIAMS
Sgt., U. S. Army

WILLIAMS
INFORMATION AND EDUCATION OFFICE
14TH ENGINEER TRAINING GROUP
ENGINEER TRAINING SECTION
FORT LEWIS, WASHINGTON



17 November 44

Hello All!

I am almost ashamed to write to you, after having procrastinated so long. Of course, you realize that I think of you and Howard quite often and my negligence in writing is not because of any lack of interest.

The last time that I wrote to you, I was a member of the 29th Special Service Company. In August, that company was inactivated and all officers and enlisted men became members of the Engineer Training Section here at Fort Lewis. For a short while, I was clerk for one of the training companies here. Presently, I am with the Information and Education Office, under Capt. Robert W. Wilson, who was formerly with Howard's Zoology department and later with the A. S. T. P. He is Information and Education Officer for the 14th Group.

There are three battalions in the 14th Group, composed of Negro and white enlisted personnel. There are only about 10 Negro officers on the post. The white enlisted personnel in the 14th Group are Preactivation Cadre in the various training companies and will eventually be leaving. As this is a training center, most of the enlisted men here are fresh from reception center.

The large majority of the trainees here are from the deep south and illiteracy is dominant. Captain Wilson is endeavoring to alleviate this condition, but the fellows seem to be rather apathetic toward anything that might better them. Many of them cannot read or write--yet they are too complacent to more than "just in the Army". They will jam the movies or any other type of entertainment, but nix to anything which improve them and make them more sociable beings.

Captain Wilson arranged with a high school about 6 miles from camp, to have night classes in a basic literacy course--reading, writing, and arithmetic. 588 "interested" soldiers signed up for the courses, but on registration night, only 232 enrolled. Now the attendance is less than 100.

I was quite surprised to find out that many young fellows my age and even younger could not even read or write their own names. Yet they are not interested in improving themselves. Their smug complacency irks me no end. Who knows--they may wake up someday.

In my work, I introduce orientation films to the recruits. The orientation program is composed of films and discussions. The films are a "Why We Fight" series, dealing with the background and early developments of the war. The discussions are about topics of military and post-war interest... "What To Do With Germany After the War", "Propaganda", "How Can the United Nations Maintain World Peace After the War", etc. Before each discussion, I hold briefing sessions with the orientation discussion leaders (6 from each company, 30 companies). I check on the company discussions during the periods set aside for them. The movies and discussions are on alternate weeks. I am also a member of the Sunday forums, member of our "Information, Please", and associate editor of the 14th Group newspaper, which, incidentally, I named "The Castle". I also assist with the literacy school--checking attendance, loading the trucks, and clerical duties. In addition to this, I am a student at the Seattle Stenotype Institute, which requires that I study at least nine hours per week, and attend the institute at least twice a month for examinations.

All this, is part, explains why I have not written...I'm rather pressed for time. Nothing of real interest goes on around here..(This is the Army!). I really wish that I were overseas. If I were not working with Captain Wilson, I would volunteer for overseas duty; however, I think that I will "make the boat" yet. This continental training is getting monotonous.

Well, folks, this is about all for now. I've got to introduce a film in a few minutes. Give my regards to all Howard, and "puleeze" send me some Howard literature.

As ever,

Rollin

P. S. I'll be seeing you around the middle of January.